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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Wasn't it just last week that I mentioned that it was a really bad week? Well, it got even worse! My "wayward" employee isn't gone, but out on "administrative leave" (not allowed to work, but paid!). The politics and red tape just drives me crazy! And now I have another employee who screwed up royally that needs to be dealt with and this is starting to become a production as well. While I believe that employees should be guaranteed certain rights, I don't believe that employers should be handcuffed by them. This all just succeeds in making a department stressed and counter-productive! Thankfully, the weekend is here and I can try and relax.

I hope the weather holds up. It's been cool and rainy for most of the week. My father and brother are supposed to drive up for a visit; it would be nice if the weather cooperated!

Well, I'm going to keep this week's column short - lots of things to get done before the weekend arrives. And, I need some well-deserved stress relief playing Diablo II on the PC!

Until next time...

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HighWire .04 Released

The HighWire Development Team has released the fourth demonstration package, as always we would like to thank you for your interest and support. At the time of the last release, we promised you some exciting developments. While we believe that we have delivered that in this package, we found ourselves in the same position that we were in last month. That is, with developments accelerating in all directions, new supports and bug fixes being submitted on almost a daily basis. We finally came to a point that we agreed to release at. Although to be honest and to peak your curiosity a bit. The truth of the matter is there are some really fun things coming in the next package and we realized, that unless we got a version out quickly we would be back into a major bug elimination phase. Faced with that situation, we

decided that some of the things in this version were just too nice to have locked away for several more weeks and that the best thing would be to get everyone up to the next level.

What have we been up to for the last month? As always a quick glance at the history.txt file will give you an idea of the progress that has been made since the last release. Around 900 lines have been added to the history file, so that will give the most adventurous something to do. However we will try to condense that down a bit in this letter to give you an idea of what has been added.

Although we generally try to avoid pointing any particular team member out, we do need to specifically recognize a couple of team members for their contributions with this update.

Highwire is now Unicode compliant, with many thanks going to team member Rainer Seitel. There are some more details on this below in the section marked 'International Character Set support', And from this editors point of view, this code is a truly great addition to the open source repository of atari code, as well as an exciting addition to HighWire itself. To get an idea of the magnitude of this support open the uni_bics.html file in the HTML folder.

Ralph Lowinski (aka AltF4) has made major improvements across a wide range of functions of HighWire, resulting in greater speed and stability. For his continuing work on HighWire we all own him a debt of gratitude.

A few of the general highlights of this release include more hotkeys, zoom text, improved IMG tag handling, background window scrolling, scrolling via the keyboard... the list goes on. Really improvements have been made throughout the code again. Tables support has been expanded and is more robust, frame handling has been improved again. More common buggy HTML code is supported. And that is only a portion of the improvements.

While we have set a great task before us, our goal is achievable, it will just take time and your support. We can always use more programmers and support on the documentation side of the project always is a critical need. Translation support for more languages would be a great addition to the project as well.

We do feel that we have something here that shows that our platforms need for an open source browser can be obtained. Currently it should not really be classified as a browser, but more of a demonstration of a parsing and rendering engine. This technology is open source, so hopefully with your support it can be the core to many projects on our platform. Not the least of which will be in the future a fully modern web browser. To reach that goal we will need time and the help of community.

Downloads available at http://highwire.atari-users.net/

Related developments include the following.

New Layout for the HighWire site thanks to GokMase

New Fontlist v 1.11

New Highwire Users mailing list thanks to atari-users.net

HighWire Development Team

http://highwire.atari-users.net

Marijuana Mail Update

Marijuana Mail is a simple e-Mail-Client for use with STinG and/or STiK2. The program is very small and works with a humble 1MB ST.

Marijuana Mail now reaches version 0.1.67.

http://marijuana.atari.org/

Tempest Site and Project Update

The fmax.atari.org site is no longer operational. The Tempest and all its co-projects do live on though. Direct all questions to me (svenka@it.kth.se) directly and stay tuned for a new site to appear. Hopefully as soon as in the next few days.

Best regards,

Sven Karlson - Istari Software

New NetHack Version

New version of NetHack has been released.

NetHack is one of the longest ever developed games, available for many platforms including ATARI.

You can download new version (3.40) from www.nethack.org

http://www.nethack.org

Level 9 Text Adventure Interpreter

The Level 9 Interpreter 2.0 has been ported successfully to the Atari. L9 2.0 is used to play classic Level 9 text adventures of the 80’s on today’s computers. Level 9 had big success especially in England with relatively simple adventures which fitted on a single cassette. They were also known as Britain’s answer to Infocom. The interpreter plays all old Level 9 games but it does not show graphics. Game files are required but don’t have to be obtained from the ST versions of the games.

http://www.mypenguin.de/prg/

TOS 2.06 User Guide Out Now!

The day has finally arrived....

After spending over 4 months with this, my in-depth user-guide for TOS 2.06 is finally ready!

It covers just about everything TOS 2.06 has to offer, with lots of illustrations, examples and easy to understand explanations.
It should be of use to any TOS 2.06 user (perhaps with the exception of the experts out there ;-)

The guide comes in the form of HTML documents and can be read using any graphic web browser. I've taken care to keep the file-names within the 8+3 naming format so that it can also be viewed on a standard Atari ST using CAB. But since the pages are pretty graphic intensive they may take a while to finish loading (think of it as an alternative to a paper-based guide.

I hope you will find the guide both useful and enjoyable to read!
You can download it from the following location:

ftp://gem.win.co.nz/hall/tos_206/GUIDE206.ZIP

Hallvard
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Atari Launchpad : <http://launchpad.atari.org>
Notator/Creator SL : <http://www.notator.org>

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. I really hate to beat this particular drum again, but people seem to be getting dumber and dumber even as I type this. Maybe I'm just getting old, but everywhere I look I see people doing dumb things and blaming someone else for it. Damn. I'm starting to sound like one of those old-timers that we all used to make fun of back when we were kids. It's not just in the computer world, it's everywhere you look... On the roads, in the stores, and in the workplaces. At this point in time, my only hope is that things run in a cycle and, as a whole, we'll get smarter as time goes on.

I've already noticed myself using phrases like, "when I first started using computers...". It bothers me a little bit, but I suppose that it's bothered most of the people who've caught themselves doing it.

The thing that puzzles me is that, in the midst of all this stupidity there are those who truly excel and contribute to make our lives better. Even in the world of Atari there are still wonders to be found. State-of-the-art web browsers? Ethernet networking? Accelerators? New

game machines... with games built right in? Yep. We've got 'em!

Sure, there are many more things released for the Intel platform every day, but hey, Atari hasn't made a computer or a game console in HOW long?

Thanks guys, for keeping this planet's cumulative IQ from dropping to through the mantle and straight into the core!

Well, let's get to the news, hints, tips, and info from the UseNet:

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Joseph Place asks about upgrading an old version of MagiC:

"I have an old version of MagiC (2.0). I don't suppose this can be upgraded with the 6.2 files on the ASH site? Is there an upgrade path for a version this old?"

Mike Freeman tells Joseph:

"Unfortunately, the 6.2 upgrade is only for version 6.1. Even version 6.01 users have to pay (about $50 US) for any upgrades. I'm not sure what 2.0 users would have to pay."

Joseph now asks about networking:

"Can anyone direct me to a web page with detailed instructions for setting up a MIDI network with Sting?"

Karl Samyn tells Joseph:

"You'll find a couple of links on this page :

http://gallery.uunet.be/saka/atari/lan/index.htm

Especially the page of olivier boolage is very good..."

Joseph tells Karl:

"Thanks so much for your help. It's up and running, but I still have a lot to learn!"

Martin Byttebier tells us that there's a new version of one of my favorite text processors available:

"I just discovered there is a new version of QED out.
You can find the German version on
<URL:http://heinisoft.atari-users.net>"

Dennis Vermeire tells Martin:

"A bit off topic but what the heck...:
People, who find QED to limited for their needs, should take a look at Luna from RGF soft. There’s a new public beta version 2.09 on the website ready to download.... furthermore Luna is now freeware.
http://www.rgfsoft.com"

Martin tells Dennis:

"Yes I noticed that too. A bug report is on his way to the author."

Martin Tarenskeen jumps in and posts:

"I’m getting a "Wrong RSC version" message when I try this new QED version. German or English RSC file, same story."

Martin Byttebier finds himself with the same problem and posts:

"The problem Martin Tarenskeen and I have seems to be related to the system we use. We both use FreeMiNT. Under plain TOS it works."

Jo Even Skarstein uses it too, and posts:

"I’m using MiNT/N.AES myself, and QED 5 works fine here. I’m using the English RSC."

Martin Byttebier tells Jo Even:

"I’ve it working now. I have two Qed version on the same partition: /qed v4.53) and /qed-beta. If I rename /qed/qed.rsc into /qed/qed.rf. the beta version will work."

Martin Tarenskeen replies:

"I also have it working now. My analysis of the problem:
I had an environment variable set with

export QED="D:\QED\"

in my xaaes configuration file. When testing the new QED version, QED looked for the rsc file in the directory of the old QED.

This is not a bug, it’s a feature that makes it easier for me to call QED from the bash, or as an external editor for some unix apps. (On my setup /usr/bin/qed is a symbolic link to /d/QED/QED.APP.)"

The problem now solved, Martin B. replies:

"Aha, this was the culprit indeed. I also had an env var $DED set in n_aes.cnf."

Paul Nurminen asks about using a PC keyboard with a Falcon:

"I know there used to be a couple different devices that allowed you to use a standard PC keyboard with a Falcon, but what's still available, and what's the best solution?

If it makes a difference, I'm in the USA, so if you know of a North American vendor that carries these devices, that would be helpful."

Laurent Favard tells Paul:

"I don't know if there are a lot of solution available now to use a PC keyboard with a Falcon, but to solve this problem i designed a small interface which allow to connect any _PS/2_ keyboard AND _PS/2_ mouse to any Atari.

Have a look to my web pages...you can build it yourself because it's a free project, schematic and all required are available or contact me to discuss how i can send to you an Eiffel interface."

Peter West posts:

"R G Faika (Luna, Arthur...) has made available an invaluable tool for translators who are having problems finding the exact keywords in the program file that call the relevant page in ST-Guide. (OK, I was :-) but others should also find it useful.)

It's called St-Guide-Trojan and can be downloaded from
http://www.rgfsoft.com
The archive contains both English and German versions.

The problem it solves is due to the fact that in many programs these calling keywords are also used for other purposes, such as window titles and/or in dialogs, so they *have* to be translated, usually with a hex editor. But the (English) translation is often shorter than the (German) original, leaving spaces between the keywords. Afterwards it is almost impossible to tell which space(s) belong to which keyword. And at times it is not obvious just what the relevant keyword for a function is.

To use the Trojan, disable the real ST-Guide by renaming .ACC to say .ACR (for 'real' - not ACX!) and unload it, rename the Trojan to ST-Guide.ACC and either start it with a double-click (under Magic etc) or reboot. After this every call for an ST-Guide page from using Help buttons in dialogs, or in some programs Ctrl-clicking on a menu entry or icon (as in PixArt), brings up a small alert showing both the name of the HYP file and the page reference called. Both are enclosed in quote marks so that you can see any leading or trailing spaces clearly. It's useful for checking whether some items don't have a link, too.

After use, disable the Trojan again and unload it, then rename .ACR to .ACC (or ACX) and restart the real ST-Guide.

I was most impressed with rgf's work. I mailed him about the problem I had been having with a certain multi-page program, and he ran this up on the spot in 20 minutes so I had it the same day! Many thanks!"

Derryck Croker tells Peter:

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Hallvard Tanderaas asks for help with boot floppies:

"Here's the thing:

I have HDdriver installed as the driver for my Mega STe internal harddisk, but have created an emergency boot floppy disk which I'll be using in case the hard disk becomes unbootable for some reason (if the harddisk driver on the hard disk is damaged I can boot from the floppy and then reinstall it on the hard disk).

Well, booting from the floppy works fine, with HDdriver in the AUTO folder, or somewhere else on the floppy, where I have to run the program manually after reaching the desktop.

The strange thing is that whenever the hard disk driver is run and detects the hard disk, the hard disk's own "NEWDESK.INF" file is loaded! If I try to save the desktop again it's saved on the *hard disk*.

Naturally I want to save the desktop on the floppy, and when booting from the floppy, that "NEWDESK.INF" file should be read. i'm sure I've had it work like that in the past, but not any longer. What am I doing wrong? i've tried both AHDI and HDdriver and a combination of these (one on the floppy, another one on the hard disk drive)."

Stephen Moss tells Hallvard:

"I have not followed this thread in its entirety so forgive me if I am mentioning something that has already been suggested but I was wondering, have you always had driver software installed on your HD when you have tried this?.

If so then re-create the situation you are trying to cater for by deleting it and see what happens then, in theory this should prevent the Mega from being able to access the HD and force it boot off the Floppy thus using the floppies NEWDESK.INF file.

It's been a while since I've had to install HD Driver but I think you will be able to to re-install the HD Driver software from the floppy while retaining the current contents of the drive, but I suggest you confirm this before you remove all the driver software from your HD."

Hallvard tells Stephen:

"Yup. By removing the hard disk driver I get 4 bombs when trying to boot (regardless of trying to boot from the harddisk itself or the floppy as far as I can remember).

I did a whole lot of experimenting today and although I seem to remember that I was able to mount the hard disk (and having its icons on the desktop) AND save NEWDESK.INF to the *floppy disk*.

...but seeing how many different situations I've tried to rectify this problem and what has been said here I may have been mistaken.

Checking the date of the NEWDESK.INF file on one of my boot disks (with HDdriver in both the AUTO folder and on the root of the disk itself so I can run it manually if disabled from the AUTO folder) I see that I created it several months ago, so the same thing must have happened back then.

Anyway, I've created a very detailed explanation on how to boot from a floppy disk on a harddisk and harddisk-less system in my TOS 2.06 user guide.

To quickly summarize, this is what I've found out:

-"NEWDESK.INF" is saved to the same drive that loaded it when booting.

-When the harddisk driver (i.e. HDDRIVER.PRG) is located within the AUTO folder of the boot floppy, the "NEWDESK.INF" file is read from the hard disk.

-When the harddisk driver (i.e. HDDRIVER.PRG) is NOT located within the AUTO folder of the boot floppy, but instead run manually from the floppy (i.e. HDDRIVER.PRG is also located elsewhere on the floppy) the

"NEWDESK.INF" file is read from the floppy disk.

-Hard drive icons aren't shown on the desktop unless the drive(s) have been mounted by running a hard disk driver first, then "Install devices" has to be chosen from the "Options" menu on the TOS 2.06 desktop.

-If the hard disk driver is run manually (i.e. not automatically by putting it in the floppy's AUTO folder) or there's no "NEWDESK.INF" file present on the harddisk (when running the hard disk driver from the AUTO folder on the floppy disk), the boot hard drive (drive "C") will have its icon available on the desktop.
If you have several partitions (or possibly also several other drives?) you have to manually add icons by going to the "Install Devices" menu as mentioned above."

Dr. Uwe Seimet, author of HD Driver, tells Hallvard:

"Sure, you cannot simply delete the .SYS file. This is not the correct way of removing a hard disk driver. Hard disk drivers must be removed with the tools provided for that, e.g. HDDRUTIL or HINSTALL.

This does not sound logical to me. In order to run HDDRIVER.PRG manually the desktop must have already been loaded. Otherwise you would not be able to double click HDDRIVER.PRG. Since the desktop is already active NEWDESK.INF will not be read anymore at this point."

Well folks, that's it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Playstation 2 & Xbox Price Cuts!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" GameCube To Go Online!
More 'Lord of the Rings'!
And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Sony Cuts Price of PlayStation

Underlining its faith in the video-game business as an engine for growth,

Sony Corp. slashed the price of the PlayStation 2 console in the United States Tuesday to $199, underpricing its biggest rival, Microsoft Corp.’s Xbox, by $100.

The price cut was part of a business plan outlined Tuesday by the Tokyo electronics and entertainment giant. Sony’s PlayStation 2, which has now sold more than 30 million worldwide, had been selling in the United States for $299, the same as the Xbox.

Under a strategy for the fiscal year that began last month, Sony hopes to turn around its sluggish electronics sector by connecting more products with its game and entertainment businesses as people increasingly use gadgets as network-linking tools.

Sony set up a new company called Network Application and Content Service Sector that will work as a bridge over its three "core" businesses - electronics, games and entertainment.

The new company will work on creating strategic links in services that bring the three areas together and come up with new services and products for what Sony envisions as the "broadband network society" - homes filled with Sony gadgets such as TVs, mobile phones and personal computers that link not only with each other but also to the Internet.

To pull it off, Sony is banking on its movies, encouraged by the refreshing box-office success of "Spider-Man" after years of putting out flops. The film has received positive reviews since it started showing earlier this month and is virtually assured of becoming one of the top-grossing movies ever.

"It’s been ’Spider-Man’ everywhere," chief executive Nobuyuki Idei said at a news conference at a Tokyo hotel. "Our aim is to have Sony recognized as a company with three core sectors - electronics, games and content."

If all works out as Sony hopes, people will be using Vaio computers to link up gadgets to download music by Sony performers such as Jennifer Lopez, view previews for Sony films on Sony mobile phones and watching Sony Pictures DVDs on huge Sony "home theater" TVs.

PlayStation 2 will be a key Net-linking machine as online games and other downloads become available later this year in Japan, Sony said. Sony has not said when such services for the PlayStation 2 will be available in the United States.

Ken Kutaragi, president of Sony Computer Entertainment said PlayStation 2 controls 82 percent of the market, soundly beating its rivals, the Xbox and Nintendo’s GameCube.

Microsoft has said 1.5 million Xbox consoles have been sold and it plans to ship 3.5 million or 4 million by June. Microsoft recently lowered the price of the Xbox by about a third in Europe but has kept its price in Japan and the United States unchanged. Xbox sells for $270 in Japan.

"There are no plans now to lower the Xbox price. But as a strategy, lower prices are always a possibility," said Midori Takahashi, Microsoft spokeswoman in Tokyo.

Nintendo, which makes the Mario and Pokemon games, also denied any plans to cut prices. "No chance at all," said Yasuhiro Minagawa, Nintendo spokesman in Kyoto.

Game Cube, which went on sale in the United States in November, sells for $199 and has sold about 4 million worldwide so far.

Sony officials acknowledged the company went through hard times in the fiscal year that ended in March because of the global electronics slump. But the worst is over, they said, as Sony moves forward in a new stage in the broadband era developing over the next few years.

At a time when other major Japanese electronics makers posted huge losses, Sony came out fairly unscathed, aided by its video-game and entertainment businesses. For fiscal 2001, Sony posted a net income of 15.3 billion yen ($119 million), down 9 percent from the previous year.

Microsoft Slashing Xbox Price

Microsoft Corp. is cutting the U.S. price of its Xbox video game console from $299 to $199, mirroring a move announced a day earlier by console kingpin Sony for its Playstation 2.

Microsoft, which introduced the Xbox, its first gaming console, in November, also said it will cut the price in Japan from about $270 to about $193. That move will take effect May 22.

The company announced the price cuts Wednesday.

Microsoft also announced plans with manufacturing partner Flextronics Corp. to open an Xbox factory and assembly plant this year in Doumen, China, relocating an assembly operation from Hungary. The Xbox also is made in Guadalajara, Mexico.

Operations at Doumen should "result in significant cost efficiencies," said Todd Holmdahl, Microsoft’s general manager of Xbox hardware.

Last month, Microsoft reduced the Xbox’s price by about a third in Europe and Australia.

John O’Rourke, director of global Xbox marketing, said Tuesday that the additional reductions have been in the works for several months, with an announcement previously planned for next week. He said Sony’s move forced Microsoft to accelerate its cut "to make sure nobody buys another video game system because of price."

Sony, the Japanese electronics and entertainment giant, on Tuesday slashed the U.S. price of PlayStation 2 to $199. It also lowered the price of the less advanced PS one console to $49 from $99.

Sony has been the behemoth of video console sales, shipping more than 30 million Playstation 2 units since introduction in 2000.

Worldwide Xbox sales, meanwhile, have been slower than expected. Microsoft says it expects to have shipped 3.5 million to 4 million consoles by the end of June. That’s down from an earlier estimate of 4.5 million to 6 million.

The other major player in the console market, Nintendo, has sold about 4 million of its GameCube units worldwide since their November 2001

introduction. GameCube already was selling for $199 in the United States, and Nintendo said there are no plans to cut that price.

Microsoft Uphill Battle Gets Steeper

A battle of the giants has erupted on Japanese screens. Not between helmeted samurai warriors fighting on disks but between the corporate megaliths who created such globally popular video games and are now slashing prices.

A feverish week of price slashing by the battling video game makers has left Microsoft Corp's newly launched Xbox the cheapest new-generation console in Japan, but analysts say the advantage remains with arch-rival Sony Corp's PlayStation 2.

And that advantage travels beyond Japan and into the world's biggest market -- the United States.

While Microsoft, Sony and Nintendo Ltd had all been expected to announce price cuts as competition heats up in the home game machine market, Sony beat its rivals to the punch this week.

The entertainment and electronics conglomerate, which relied on PlayStation 2 for the bulk of its operating profits in the business year to March 31, said on Tuesday it would slash the U.S. price of the PlayStation 2 by one-third, to $199.

In Japan it made a smaller cut of 6.5 percent, while giving retailers a free hand to discount. Sony says more cuts are in the pipeline.

"PlayStation 2 is kind of a done deal in terms of becoming dominant," said Noriko Manabe, analyst at J.P. Morgan, who believed Sony was just toying with its rivals by rushing to cut prices.

"You might as well have fun destroying your competitors while you're at it."

Sony already has a 10-to-one advantage over Microsoft in the number of boxes sitting in consumers' living rooms, having launched its PlayStation2 a full year-and-a-half before last March's launch of the Xbox and Nintendo's GameCube.

Within 24 hours of the Sony move, Microsoft followed suit, cutting the price of the Xbox game console in the United States to $199, putting the machine in line with PlayStation 2 and GameCube.

The company slashed the Japan price to 24,800 yen ($194.3), which is 200 yen lower than GameCube and below PlayStation 2. "The impulse purchases will rise for Xbox as well as for PlayStation 2 at that price point," said Jay Defibaugh, analyst at Credit Suisse First Boston Japan Ltd.

"Whether it will sustain at a high level is something that we will have to wait and see," he said. "This doesn't solve all of their (Microsoft's) problems by any means."

Analysts say Microsoft's price advantage in Japan could be short-lived as Sony and Nintendo could launch a new cycle of cuts.

The next is likely to come from Nintendo, which has so far boasted a competitive price.

Lisa Spicer, analyst at ING, expects Nintendo to slash the U.S. price of GameCube to $149 from $199 and the Japan price to 20,000 yen from current 25,000 yen.

"I'd imagine they would announce soon," she said.

Top-running Sony also hinted that it still has ammunition in its arsenal. Analysts say now that Sony generates profits from both hardware and software sales, it can afford such cuts.

"The cut this time will not be the last one and there will be changes in the price in the future," said Kenichi Fukunaga, senior director of SCE corporate communication.

Hisako Akitani, a manager of game retail shop GamesMaya, said the wholesale price of PlayStation 2 was trimmed by 6.5 percent to 26,000 yen ($203.7) from 27,800 yen ($217.8).

Accordingly, she said, her stores would sell PlayStation 2 at retail prices of 26,980 yen for member and 27,800 yen for non-member customers.

Sony declined to confirm the wholesale price but said it has cut it by about six percent.

While hardware makers are at each others' throats, software creators are expected to benefit because of the increased expectations for the size of hardware market.

"This means that people will buy a couple more software titles with the discount they got," said Yuta Sakurai, senior analyst, Nomura Securities.

Hit software titles are key elements for game console makers, but even on that front, Microsoft has a lot to do.

Kazumi Kitaue, executive corporate officer of software maker Konami Corp, said the price cuts alone would not convince his company to make more exclusives for Microsoft's game machine.

"Just because they cut the price, that doesn't mean they can make a comeback. It just means that the company and its rivals are now battling in the same ring," he said.

Hideki Sato, President of software maker Sega Corp, also voiced doubts that Microsoft's efforts would really produce a viable customer base for which software developers would want to develop exclusive games.

"Microsoft has cast its net further but we have to be sure there are actually fish to be caught," Sato said.

"We have to look at it with a long-term view. Quality is key for software titles. Brand image of games is important and you need to make sure you can make series out of it."

Video game maker Nintendo Co. Ltd. will introduce an online element for its GameCube this fall, executives for its U.S. subsidiary said on Monday, marking the company's cautious entry into the fledgling market for online console games.

Nintendo said it will offer dial-up and high-speed Internet adapters for the GameCube in the fall at a suggested retail price of $34.95.

Rival game console makers have already announced similar plans. Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox has a built-in broadband adapter and Sony Corp. plans to offer an adapter with both dial-up and broadband ports for $39.99 in August.

The first game to be available for online play will be Sega Corp.'s "Phantasy Star Online." Sega said on Monday the game is expected to come out this fall, the company said.

Online gaming has been a major market for PC games for years but has been slow to catch on for the console market.

Sega was ahead of the rest of the industry by building a dial-up modem into its now-discontinued Dreamcast (news - web sites), released in 1999, but limited sales for that console left the online effort a money-losing venture and prompted the company to withdraw from the competitive market for game hardware.

Nintendo is staking out a more cautious online strategy.

The company, which is the leading game maker for children and has a virtual lock on the market for handheld games, is considering a number of online projects but will not have any games ready for the fall launch, executives said.

Publishers will be able to use the online feature for their games and keep any additional fees charged to users as a result, but online gaming for the GameCube will remain largely an extension of the console play, the company said.

"Nintendo's position is that online is a feature to extend the console and the gameplay, but in and of itself online does not make a game," Jim Merrick, a technical director for Nintendo's online efforts said.

Perrin Kaplan, a Nintendo vice president, said the company will not collect any additional revenue from online games and will not charge an access fee.

Game publishers themselves will be responsible for operating the online networks on which their games run, Nintendo said.

Nintendo will also promote its Internet adapters as add-ons for specific games when that makes sense but does not plan a major marketing blitz around the GameCube's Internet capabilities, executives said.

EA to Bring The Lord of the Rings, The Two Towers to the PlayStation 2 and Game Boy Advance

One ring to rule them all... EA announces that they will bring The Lord of the Rings, The Two Towers video games to the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system and the Nintendo Game Boy Advance.

Based on New Line Cinema’s epic adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien’s classic fantasy novels, The Lord of the Rings, The Two Towers games will integrate cinema and gameplay to deliver an engaging interactive experience. In the game, players will be able to relive the most memorable movie moments from the first two films, Academy Award-winning "The Fellowship of the Ring" and upcoming "The Two Towers." Both versions of The Two Towers games will be released under the EA GAMES brand in fall 2002, in conjunction with "The Two Towers" movie.

Middle-earth comes to life in spectacular detail in EA’s first "The Lord of the Rings" action adventure game. Both versions will feature action/adventure gameplay and a third-person perspective to enhance the overall experience.

PlayStation 2

As Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli, players will battle a variety of Orcs and square off against vicious boss monsters including the Cave Troll and Saruman. A tactical gameplay system will encourage players to react quickly and be strategic with their selection of characters, weaponry and combat moves. Set in 16 mission locations, each environment will have a close visual correlation to that seen in the first two films. The game is being co-developed by EA’s Redwood Shores Studio and Stormfront Studios.

Game Boy Advance

The handheld version will allow players to take control of four characters: Aragorn, Legolas, Frodo and Gandalf the Wizard. Over 30 levels per character will challenge each member of the Fellowship, bringing the grand total to over 120 levels in the entire game. Linked play will accommodate two-player multiplayer action via the GBA Link Cable. The game is being developed by Griptonite Games, an Amaze Entertainment Studio.

EA has secured the exclusive worldwide licensing rights to create games based on New Line’s epic trilogy. The Lord of the Rings, The Two Towers will be the first in an ongoing series of The Lord of the Rings games from EA. Future titles are under development and will be released on multiple platforms in 2003 and 2004. For more information on EA’s The Lord of the Rings games, visit the official product website at: http://lordoftherings.ea.com.

"We do believe online gaming will be viable at some point but we don’t want to club the consumer in the head with it either," Merrick said.

Super Bowl XXXVI MVP Tom Brady Signs on as Cover Athlete for 989 Sports’ NFL GameDay 2003 for PlayStation and PlayStation2

Fresh off leading his team to victory in Super Bowl XXXVI and winning the coveted crown of Super Bowl MVP, Sony Computer Entertainment America announced today that quarterback for the Super Bowl Champion New England Patriots Tom Brady will be the cover athlete for NFL GameDay 2003 from the 989 Sports development team. After bursting onto the sports scene last year while on the NFL’s biggest stage, Tom Brady has quickly established

himself as the NFL's newest superstar. The Pro Bowl quarterback will now bring his winning ways to the PlayStation and PlayStation2 computer entertainment system with NFL GameDay 2003.

"In a short time Tom Brady has established himself as a true champion and one of the NFL's most exciting young talents," said Ami Blaire, director, product marketing, Sony Computer Entertainment America. "His fierce competitive nature and leadership have made him a winner on the field and his true dedication to the sport will keep him at the top of his game for many years to come. We, at 989 Sports are proud to be associated with an engaging athlete of Tom's caliber as he embodies all of the hard-core football ideals in NFL GameDay 2003."

In only his second season in the NFL, Tom Brady became the sports world's success story of the year when he stepped in as the starting quarterback for the New England Patriots. Taking over in the second game of the 2001 season, Brady never looked back as he led his team to victory in Super Bowl XXXVI where he capped off a Pro Bowl season by being named Super Bowl MVP. Making his winning ways all the more remarkable, 24 year old Tom Brady's victory in the Super Bowl made him the youngest starting quarterback ever to bring home the Lombardi trophy.

Scheduled to release in September, NFL GameDay 2003 promises to capture the power and athleticism of the NFL like no other football simulation before with ultra realistic gameplay and new high-resolution player models that recreate the NFL experience in intricate detail and an all-new online mode that will allow gamers to take on challengers nationwide. Featuring new 60 frame per second gameplay, NFL GameDay 2003 brings unprecedented football action to life with unmatched responsive control over fluid animations including 300 new tackles, catches and blocks and over 70 new "break tackle" animations that make for heart stopping replay action of all 32 NFL teams including the expansion Houston Texans.

Mad Catz Announces Full Line of Peripherals for Fall 2002

Mad Catz Interactive, Inc. announced the launch of the Company's Fall 2002 line of peripherals for PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube and Game Boy Advance.

The Company will unveil 23 new accessories at this year's E3 show in Los Angeles at Booth #500 in South Hall from May 22-24, 2002. One of the more notable highlights is the Company's new line of Lynx wireless controllers for PlayStation 2 and Xbox. All upcoming products are due to launch in the U.S. and/or Europe over the next several months.

"In keeping with our goal to create the industry's highest quality products at competitive prices, we have developed an exciting new line of fall accessories. We are particularly looking forward to the release of the Lynx wireless controllers that we have designed for PlayStation 2 and Xbox. We expect them to be extremely well received by the market as the installed base of these new consoles continues to grow," said Darren Richardson, President and COO of Mad Catz, Inc.

Mr. Richardson continued, "Over 145 million Americans (60%) play video and computer games and they continue to be the fastest growing entertainment form. This is particularly good news for Mad Catz as it provides us with additional opportunities to design and develop the creative accessories for which Mad Catz is famous."

Lynx Wireless Controllers

Based upon the success of the 900MHz wireless controller for PlayStation 2 launched in October 2001, Mad Catz has expanded its wireless line to include Lynx wireless controllers for Xbox and PlayStation 2 (also compatible with PlayStation One) to be initially released in the U.S. Like the 900MHz wireless controller for PlayStation 2, these controllers utilize radio frequency (RF) technology comparable to high-end cordless phones. The Lynx wireless controllers do not rely on line-of-sight, so that if the controllers are pointed away from the console, or if the signal is blocked by a person walking in front of it, the game will not freeze. This connectivity is achieved via a low-profile micro antenna which plugs directly into the appropriate console, enabling 40 feet of unblockable wireless range. The Lynx wireless controllers require batteries whereas the 900MHz wireless controller for PlayStation 2 uses a recharging cradle.

The Lynx wireless controllers feature fully analog pressure-sensitive action buttons and D-pad, dual analog joysticks, and rubberized grips to increase comfort. Programmable macro capabilities for complex moves will be featured in the Lynx wireless for Xbox. Both Lynx wireless controllers feature two play modes for total control in any game (analog and digital) and built-in dual vibration motors for a more pronounced, realistic gaming experience.

"After the successful debut of the 900MHz wireless controller for PlayStation 2 at last year’s E3 show, we are especially excited to introduce our next generation of Lynx wireless controllers at this year’s show," states Mr. Richardson. "Now Xbox and PlayStation 2 gamers can maximize playing time without being restricted by short cables. And, since the radio frequency technology eliminates line of sight issues, the Lynx wireless controllers provide consistent, continuous play even at a considerable distance from the console and television."

MicroCON Controllers for All Platforms

At this year’s E3 show, Mad Catz will also introduce its MicroCON controllers for PlayStation 2, Xbox and GameCube. The MicroCON controllers are smaller versions of Mad Catz’ standard controllers, created to accommodate gamers with smaller hands or to provide greater comfort and control for any gamer. The MicroCON’s sleek design provides superior control with rubberized grips to reduce fatigue and improve handling. Features include dual analog joysticks, fully analog pressure-sensitive action buttons and D-pad, intense vibration capability, two expansion bays for memory cards or other game enhancers (for Xbox), and macro programmability for complex moves (for Xbox and PlayStation 2). For added comfort and durability, both the MicroCON for PlayStation 2 (also compatible with PlayStation and PlayStation One) and GameCube have an eight-foot braided-steel cable and the MicroCON for Xbox features a nine-foot braided steel cable.

Universal Steering Wheel and Pedals for All Platforms

The Universal MC2 Racing Wheel, also making its debut at E3, works with PlayStation 2, Xbox, and GameCube consoles, and is the most realistic racing wheel on the market. The new steering wheel is based on the MC2 award winning design which offers vibration feedback, and the Mad Catz proprietary Accudrive system that allows gamers to tune the wheel sensitivity to fit individual preferences. Offering superior comfort, the Universal MC2 Racing Wheel also features a rubber-clad wheel, retractable

leg supports and pedal, ten programmable action buttons, and three control modes (steering wheel, analog and digital).

Other products making their debut include:

For PlayStation 2

Beat Pad - This digital controller for dance and action games features four-way directional control and 10 high-performance action pads. The Beat Pad works with all dance games including Konami’s Dance Dance Revolution and THQ’s Britney Dance Beat. It’s also compatible with PlayStation and PlayStation One dance games.

Light Blaster - Specially designed to work with all light gun-compatible games, the Light Blaster features vibration kickback, rapid-fire, automatic reload capabilities, a memory card expansion bay and an LED-powered light-up barrel. It also includes a traditional D-pad and reload button.

Dual Force 2 Skin Controller - Now different design skins featuring lifestyle, sports and artwork can be snapped onto the controller for more customized game play. Features of the controller include dual analog joysticks, dual vibration motors, pressure-sensitive analog action buttons and powerful macro capabilities for programming complex actions for execution by a single button. With rubberized grips for superior comfort and handling and an eight-foot extra-long reinforced cable, the Dual Force 2 Skin Controller is also compatible with PlayStation and PlayStation One.

8 MB Memory Expander - By inserting a certified PlayStation 2 8MB memory card into the Memory Expander, users can access an additional 8MB of memory, allowing for more game saves.

Controller Extension Cable - Also compatible with PlayStation and PlayStation One, this seven-foot extension cable features heavy-duty wiring, braided steel reinforcement and an assortment of colors, to match player’s controllers.

For Xbox

Light Gun - Specially designed to work with all light gun-compatible games, the Mad Catz Light Gun features vibration kickback, rapid-fire, automatic reload capabilities and an LED-powered light-up barrel. It also includes a traditional D-pad and reload button.

Ethernet Cable - To capitalize on one of the many Xbox features, the Ethernet Cable is designed to network multiple Xbox consoles together for head-to-head or team playing. The Ethernet Cable comes in a sleek green cable casing.

For GameCube

Memory Cube 251 - The 4X Memory Card delivers 16Mb of data storage, allowing for more special characters, special weapons, game positions, and high scores to be saved. Although not available in initial shipments, later shipments will feature game saves.

Memory Cube 1019 - The 16X Memory Card features 64Mb of data storage, allowing for more special characters, special weapons, custom controller settings and high scores and levels to be saved. It also features four different game saves.

5" Color Display - The attachable 5" Color Display features an integrated sound system and a high-resolution screen which attaches directly to the GameCube.

Car Adapter - Powers the GameCube from a standard auto power connection with a convenient 10-foot power cord for backseat gaming.

Controller Extension Cable - Available in many colors, this extension cable plugs directly into the GameCube console and features heavy-duty wiring, durable braided construction and a compact spool design giving an extra six feet of range between the user and the television.

For Game Boy Advance

Flip Light - Great for late night gaming, the flip light automatically illuminates the screen and provides brighter, more vivid graphics when flipped up.

Light and Magnifier - Illuminates Game Boy Advance screen and magnifies up to 1.5X the original screen size.

TV Tuner - By inserting the TV Tuner into the game slot, the Game Boy Advance can be used for both playing games and watching television.

Soft Case - Available in many colors, the soft case protects the Game Boy Advance when traveling.

Water Resistant Case - This durable case will protect the Game Boy Advance against moisture, water and dust. It is also designed with a flexible transparent front for game-play and a water resistant membrane to resonate game sounds while inside its protective case.

NYKO Patents ‘‘Air’’ -- Introduces the World’s First Air-Cooled Controller for Microsoft Xbox, Sony PlayStation 2 & Nintendo GameCube

Tired of sweaty hands while playing your favorite video game? No sweat! This year at the E3 Expo (Electronic Entertainment Expo), NYKO Technologies will introduce the only solution for this common complaint, the Air Flo game controllers for Sony PlayStation2, Nintendo GameCube and Microsoft Xbox. The new game controllers, which utilize NYKO’s patented Air Flo technology, and NYKO’s full line of gaming accessories, will be shown in the company’s booth, #2408, West Hall, at the E3 Expo, May 22-24, at the Los Angeles Convention Center.

NYKO’s patented dual-speed Air Flo technology provides gamers with a consistent flow of fresh air through the controller grips to end problematic sweaty hands and allow for more comfortable game play. The new technology is incorporated into three game controllers that will be introduced at E3, including the Air Flo for PlayStation2, the Air Flo for Nintendo GameCube and the Air Flo for Xbox. Even with the added value of NYKO’s patented Air Flo technology, all three controllers will be competitively priced.

In addition to NYKO’s patented Air Flo Technology, the advanced controllers feature rubberized grips for added comfort, a 10-foot cable and other standard features, including dual analog control sticks, 8-way D-pad, built-in variable vibration function, and pressure sensitive analog

buttons. The Air Flo controller for Xbox also boasts dual expansion slots for memory cards.

NYKO's patented Air Flo controllers for PlayStation2 and Xbox will be available in July 2002. The Air Flo controller for GameCube will be introduced in October.

Recognized in the industry as an innovator, having developed its patented Worm Light technology and now its patented Air Flo technology, NYKO fans can anticipate many other new, unique game accessories to be announced at E3 including:

WormCam

Photographically inspired? Use your Nintendo Game Boy Advance to view and edit amazing color pictures taken with NYKO's WormCam (MSRP $29.99). The WormCam also boasts a unique "spycam" mode that allows pictures to be taken either by motion detection or time-lapse photography. The WormCam stores up to 20 pictures with help from an internal battery and the rotating camera allows for greater ease-of-use. Providing a 10-bit RGB 356x292-pixel resolution, the WormCam also allows users to upload video snapshots to a PC for editing and emailing, PC link cable included.

Super Magni-Light for Game Boy Advance

A combination screen light and magnifier for the Game Boy Advance, the Super Magni-Light (MSRP $14.99) is ideal for game play in low light conditions such as in the car, airplane -- or under the covers at night! Featuring a dual LED light for optimum coverage and brightness, the Super Magni-Light requires no additional batteries and boasts a 1.5x high quality magnifier lens.

Memory Cards for Nintendo GameCube

Save your game data with confidence! NYKO introduces its 8Mb (MSRP $19.99) and 4Mb (MSRP $14.99) memory cards -- the first third party memory cards for the GameCube. Showing off a sleek, unique design, the memory cards are available in a variety of colors, such as indigo, black, red and orange. The easy-to-grab rubber NYKO grip and ridged sides allow for simple, secure transfer in and out of the gaming system. In addition, the protective storage case keeps the memory cards clean and safe for reliable game saves.

Power Switch for PlayStation2

NYKO solves another gamers' pet peeve with the Power Switch (MSRP $9.99), an adaptor which relocates the PlayStation2 power switch to the front of the system for easy access. Specially engineered to match the PlayStation2, the convenient button relocation is perfect for hard-to-reach entertainment centers. Additionally, the Power Switch reduces the risk of overheating and excessive power consumption by getting its power from the game system itself.

Play Cube for GameCube

GameCube fans will also appreciate having the ability to convert the Playstation or PlayStation2 pad to a GameCube controller. The Play Cube (MSRP $9.99) eliminates the need to purchase additional controllers and also allows vibration function.

These products, as well as other NYKO accessories, can be found at all

major consumer electronics and video game stores.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Supreme Court: More Review of Web Porn Law

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled on Monday that community standards may be used to shield minors from Internet pornography, but said other free-speech problems must be resolved before the restrictions in the federal law can take effect.

By an 8-1 vote, the justices set aside a U.S. appeals court ruling that the law violated constitutional free-speech protections solely because it relied on community standards to identify online pictures and writings harmful to minors.

Justice Clarence Thomas said reliance on community standards does not by itself render the law too broad under the First Amendment, but he acknowledged other constitutional problems with the law need to be decided.

The Child Online Protection Act, adopted by Congress and signed by President Bill Clinton in 1998, requires commercial Web site operators to use credit cards or adult access systems before allowing Internet users to view material deemed harmful to minors.

The law has never been enforced. It immediately was challenged on First Amendment grounds by the American Civil Liberties Union and 17 groups and businesses, including online magazine publishers and booksellers.

Thomas said the government still remained barred from enforcing the law, sending the case back for a lower court in Philadelphia to decide whether it was unconstitutionally vague, too broad for other reasons or failed to survive strict scrutiny.

Last month, the court struck down by a 6-3 vote a separate federal law banning "virtual child pornography" that uses young adults or computer-generated pictures to depict children, ruling it violates free speech rights.

The new ruling ensured the legal battle will go forward in a case that has pitted free-speech rights against efforts by Congress to regulate cyberspace by keeping minors away from online pornography.

"The court clearly had enough doubts about this broad censorship law to leave in place the ban, which is an enormous relief to our clients," said Ann Beeson, litigation director of the ACLU's Technology and Liberty Program.

"This case is still very much a work in progress," she said, noting a

majority of the court appeared to have grave doubts about the law's constitutionality. "We are confident the court will ultimately strike down this law," she said.

The appeals court specifically objected to how the law defined harmful as based on the average person in applying "contemporary community standards" and said it would effectively force all speakers on the Web to abide by the "most puritan" standards.

In a separate concurring opinion, Justice Anthony Kennedy, joined by Justices David Souter and Ruth Bader Ginsburg, said a "very real likelihood" existed that the law was too broad and would not survive further review.

Justices Sandra Day O'Connor and Stephen Breyer, in separate concurring opinions, both supported a national standard for the Internet.

In dissent, Justice John Paul Stevens said community standards would not work in cyberspace. He said, "The community that wishes to live without certain material not only rids itself, but the entire Internet of the offending speech."

He said speech is effectively prohibited whenever the least tolerant communities find it harmful to minors.

Stevens expressed concern the law could cover advertisements, online magazines, bulletin boards, chat rooms, stock photo galleries, Web diaries and a variety of illustrations encompassing a vast number of messages.

Spokeswoman Barbara Comstock said the Justice Department was "pleased" by the ruling and would defend the law as it undergoes further review in the courts.

Jay Sekulow of the American Center for Law and Justice, a conservative legal group, said the decision "makes one thing very clear: there are still many constitutional hurdles ahead in the battle to protect children from online pornography."

Supreme Court Cracks Down On Web Porn

In a minor setback for civil liberties groups challenging a law that cracks down on Internet smut, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled the Child Online Protection Act may not be overly broad.

On Monday, justices voted 8-1 to send the case back for reconsideration by the lower court that struck down the law. However, the high court did not lift an injunction preventing enforcement of the law, meaning the government's hands are still tied when it comes to blocking content deemed harmful to minors.

COPA passed in 1998 and made it illegal to sell sexually explicit material via the Web if minors could see it. Since then, the measure has been bogged down in the courts amid challenges it was overly broad and violated the First Amendment by preventing adults from accessing certain Web content.

The court said COPA's use of "community standards" to determine harmful material did not make the law overly broad, as the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court

of Appeals in Philadelphia had determined in a previous ruling. However, it did not address other challenges to the law, including charges that COPA is vague and does not use the least restrictive measure possible to protect children from porn.

Instead, the high court ordered the 3rd Circuit to consider those issues, meaning legal battles surrounding COPA are far from over.

"Whether COPA is constitutional was left to be decided another day on other grounds," said Erwin Chemerinsky, a law professor at the University of Southern California.

In their mixed decision, the only issues the judges agreed upon were that the law should be sent back to a lower court and that the injunction should remain in place.

Writing for the majority, Justice Clarence Thomas cited earlier rulings upholding the concept of community standards.

"We have observed that it is neither realistic nor constitutionally sound to read the First Amendment as requiring that the people of Maine or Mississippi accept public depiction of conduct found tolerable in Las Vegas or New York City," he wrote.

However, Justice John Paul Stevens said that although the imposition of community standards can shield children from inappropriate speech, it can also damage free speech in cyberspace.

"In this context of the Internet, this shield also becomes a sword, because the community that wishes to live without certain material not only rids itself, but (rids) the entire Internet of the offending speech," Stevens wrote.

Civil liberties groups are hoping the lower court eventually will overturn the law on other grounds.

The Supreme Court’s ruling "doesn’t really change the equation one way or the other," said John Morris, staff counsel with the Center for Democracy and Technology, which filed a brief urging the court to overturn the law. Morris called Monday’s ruling "one step in a long line of litigation" related to the law.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), which led the challenge of COPA, praised the court’s decision to let the injunction stand. "The court clearly had enough doubts about this broad censorship law to leave in place the ban, which is an enormous relief to our clients," ACLU attorney Ann Beeson said in a statement.

Nevertheless, the ruling could turn out to be a minor victory for those hoping to rein in objectionable material on the Web. For one thing, the court didn’t specifically brand the law unconstitutional, as it has done in other Web content cases such as one brought against the 1996 Communications Decency Act. What’s more, anti-porn activists can argue that material may violate community standards in conservative areas in their attempts to remove it from the Web.

But those arguments may be somewhat tempered because the court was vague in defining what constitutes a community when it comes to determining such standards, leaving open the question of whether local or national tastes and values will define what’s acceptable on the Net.

Legal experts agreed that the ruling was a minor bump on the road to determining how Web content is regulated.

Christopher Wolf, an attorney with Proskauer Rose, thinks COPA eventually will go the way of other attempts to protect children online. "I'd be surprised if it is ever validated," Wolf said. "In the meantime, the law is off the books, and free speech is alive and well."

Napster CEO Quits As Sale Rejected

Napster Chief Executive Konrad Hilbers is stepping down, capping months of unsuccessful negotiations to sell the file-swapping company and settle lawsuits hanging over its business.

The company may also be close to filing for bankruptcy, according to at least one source close to Napster. In an e-mail to the company Tuesday, Hilbers confirmed that a last-ditch attempt to sell the company outright to German media giant Bertelsmann had fallen through after opposition from Napster's quarrelling board of directors.

The management team "has put together what I consider to be a valid and beneficial deal for Napster over the last weeks," Hilbers said in the e-mail, a copy of which was seen by CNET News.com. "Unfortunately, the board has chosen to not pursue the deal...I am convinced that not pursuing the offer is a mistake, and it will lead the company to a place where I don't want to lead it."

Bertelsmann confirmed the deal's rejection.

"We regret that the Napster shareholders were unable to reach an agreement regarding the offer from Bertelsmann," the company said in a statement. "However, we continue to believe in the value of peer-to-peer technology. We are hopeful that Napster's brand and technology will be able to realize its potential as a compelling consumer proposition."

The dissolution of this Bertelsmann deal does not mean the company is relinquishing all hope of taking over Napster, however. The media giant has bankrolled Napster with tens of millions of dollars in loans and is likely its largest creditor. Should Napster file for bankruptcy, it still could gain control of the company or access to its technology.

Hilbers, who took the top spot last July, has been uniformly upbeat in his predictions that the former file-swapping star would rebound and create a new, legal service based on broad deals with the very record labels suing it. But the company has postponed the launch of its subscription plans indefinitely, as legal settlement and music licensing talks have fallen through.

The last several months have been marked by internal struggles, as original investor John Fanning has fought board members Hank Barry and John Hummer, both representing venture capital firm Hummer Winblad, for control of the company.

A lawsuit filed by Fanning in Delaware court in an attempt to wrest control from the venture capitalists was dismissed Tuesday, the company confirmed.

Konrad’s departure, and the collapse of the Bertelsmann deal, leaves the once-proud file-swapping company with few resources at its disposal. It has had little to no income since opening its doors in 1999 and has been living on loans from Bertelsmann that have totaled more than $85 million for operational expenses alone.

Bertelsmann had also promised to pay tens of millions of dollars in additional legal settlement and music licensing fees. Napster has had several rounds of layoffs, cutting staff already dangerously close to the bone.

A representative for the company said Napster had not filed for bankruptcy and that no plans had yet been made to do so. However, with no revenue coming in, the company is on increasingly tenuous ground.

"We deeply regret that we have not yet been able to find a funding solution that would allow Napster to launch a service to benefit artists and consumers alike," the company said in a statement. "We will be looking at additional steps in the coming week to further reduce expenses."

A replacement for Hilbers or an interim CEO has yet to be named, a company representative said.

Bertelsmann Snaps Up Napster

Embattled Internet music upstart Napster Inc. was handed a new lease on life Friday as German media giant Bertelsmann stepped in with $8 million to buy its assets and keep the online song-swap service in business.

The surprise deal also brought Napster Chief Executive Officer Konrad Hilbers and founder Shawn Fanning back into the fold just days after they quit the company amid fears that mounting legal, financial and technical problems would silence Napster for good.

"While this has been a very unusual week, I’m pleased that I and my colleagues can move forward and give our full attention to Napster’s future," Hilbers said in a statement.

Bertelsmann’s agreement to provide $8 million for Napster’s creditors will allow the company to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection and emerge as a wholly-owned subsidiary of Europe’s second-largest media group, officials said.

It will then resume its much-delayed plan to relaunch as a subscription digital music service that complies with U.S. copyright law.

Analysts said the deal, which gives Bertelsmann control of Napster for far less than the $15 million to $30 million it might have cost to buy the company outright, could nevertheless prove a good deal for the online music company.

"This development could very well breathe new life into this Napster," said Phil Leigh, a financial analyst at Raymond James & Associates.

Napster, once one of the hottest properties on the Internet, has been offline since July 2001 as it fights a music piracy lawsuit by major

record labels.

The service this week signaled it was nearing the end of the game as Hilbers, Fanning and several other senior executives quit after a dispute among board members derailed a Bertelsmann bid to buy the company outright.

That quarrel was resolved by a Delaware court Tuesday, setting up a new Napster board chaired by Hilbers.

Bertelsmann, which broke ranks with other music companies by buying a stake in Napster in 2000, said it was now ready to help push the company toward its goal of becoming a secure, membership-charging service.

"Creating new ways of doing business is never easy, but Napster will be at the forefront of finding business models that respect copyright, reward artists, and deliver entertainment value to consumers," Joel Klein, chief executive of the U.S. arm of Bertelsmann, said in a statement.

"Peer-to-peer is a transforming technology and we're proud to have Shawn Fanning continue to work on its development."

Fanning, who founded Napster as a college student in 1999 and will now serve as the company's chief technology officer, said he was pleased to be moving forward with Bertelsmann.

"Bertelsmann understood our vision when they first invested in us," Fanning said. "They still believe in that vision."

Fanning's vision was in part what landed Napster in trouble in the first place.

While wildly popular with millions of users around the globe, the service quickly drew the ire of the recording industry, which in late 1999 filed suit charging it with abetting music piracy by allowing users to download digital music files from other people's computers without paying any royalty fees to copyright holders.

Lengthy litigation resulted in a court injunction which barred the service from offering copyrighted songs identified by the labels.

While Napster now says it will relaunch as a royalty-paying service, company officials concede there have been both technical difficulties in setting up the system and contract difficulties with record labels declining to provide licenses for their music.

"The biggest remaining job for Bertelsmann is to get content, to get the other record labels to agree to use Napster," said Leigh of Raymond James.

Sources close to the company said Friday they still had no firm date for the Napster relaunch, but would said it would only take place once all the kinks had been worked out.

"For Bertelsmann this is a long-term play," one source said, adding that Napster's high brand visibility, established "community" of users and peer-to-peer format were all assets.

Jupiter Media Matrix analyst Stacey Herron said that while Napster remained the most famous of the digital music services, it would still face competition from newer companies that have sprung up during the long

months of litigation.

"This announcement certainly doesn’t secure the future of Napster as a thriving business," Herron said.

"You can’t simply turn back the clock and make Napster what it was two years ago."

AOL Won’t Let IE Take Mac Test

America Online has dropped Internet Explorer from a test version of its software for Mac OS X, the latest sign that the Internet giant wants a rematch in the browser wars with Microsoft.

AOL for Mac OS X version 2 includes an integrated browser using technology created by Netscape Communications, according to a note to beta testers describing the software’s features, which was obtained Thursday by CNET News.com. In addition, the upgrade includes a new "aquafied" look "in the spirit" of OS X’s liquid-like user interface, as well as instant messaging (news - web sites) and Buddy List support for chatting with Mac.com users, among other things, the note said.

The Mac switch comes after AOL released a version of its CompuServe online service based on Netscape’s Gecko technology instead of IE. In an e-mail to software testers in March, AOL said it also is trying out Gecko on its latest software, AOL 7.0. Gecko technology allows Web pages to be displayed, serving as a foundation for Web browsers. AOL and Netscape are both divisions of AOL Time Warner.

AOL’s Gecko tests signal the latest salvo in an ongoing battle between two technology giants vying for domination of the Internet. AOL has the largest Internet audience, and switching to its own browser could greatly affect how those people view the Web. Most browsers do not generate any direct revenue, but they can influence where Web surfers go and what applications they use.

Microsoft and AOL have theoretically squared off in the browser market since AOL announced in November 1998 that it would acquire Netscape for $4.2 billion. But AOL had until recently avoided a direct confrontation, sticking to a long-term deal that made IE its default browser in exchange for distribution of its software in new versions of Microsoft’s Windows operating system.

The relationship has increasingly shown signs of wear.

Last summer, the two companies tangled over terms for bundling AOL into Microsoft’s Windows XP operating system. Talks dissolved after the two companies could not agree on terms of the deal.

This year, Netscape sued Microsoft, capping years of allegations that the software giant had forced its way into the browser market by abusing its monopoly in desktop operating systems.

AOL and Microsoft did not immediately return requests for comment.

Analysts downplayed the significance of the Netscape switch for Mac, saying the browser wars ended years ago.

Since IE 6 was unveiled last August, Netscape's browser has fallen from about 12 percent of the market to just 7 percent, according to research published in March by StatMarket, a division of audience measurement service WebSideStory.

"I'm not sure how this transfers into shareholder value" for AOL, said analyst Paul Kim of investment bank Kaufman Bros. "There is no way to monetize browsers. This is more like AOL saying, 'Hey, I'm not going to use Microsoft's products.'"

Apple Computer has made a big bet on OS X, the latest and greatest operating system for its Mac personal computer. OS 9 is used on the majority of the 25 million Macs in service. Earlier this month, Apple CEO Steve Jobs (news - web sites) said he expects some 5 million people will be using OS X by year's end, up from 1 million at the start of 2002.

As AOL has drifted away from Microsoft, it has drawn closer to Apple. A new version of OS X due out this August will support instant messaging between Mac and America Online's closely guarded AOL Instant Messenger service. Last year, Apple switched the default home page for Mac to Netscape.com from Excite.com, following the bankruptcy of Excite parent Excite@Home.

In its note to beta testers AOL suggested that the latest browser switch offers a significant boost for consumers.

"Since the beginning of the Web, industry groups and Web site developers have clamored for a browser that would support currently accepted standards for Web content," the note reads. "If you are surfing the Web, pages will look better, and you can view all the latest eye-pleasing special effects, graphics and styles that Web developers put into their sites."

Judge Warns Microsoft to Keep Promise

U.S. District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly gave Microsoft a stern warning Friday to keep its promise to abide by antitrust penalties expected later this year.

John Shenefield, an expert testifying for the nine states still suing Microsoft, said the states have little expectation that Microsoft will change its ways.

"If you have monopoly power and you're making a lot of money doing what you're doing, there's very little incentive to change the way you live," Shenefield said. "Hope springs eternal, but you're dealing with a monopolist."

Microsoft's expert, Charles F. "Rick" Rule, said he was "somewhat offended" by Shenefield's statement.

"They very much want to be in compliance," Rule said of Microsoft. "I believe that Microsoft is very sincere of that."

Kollar-Kotelly said she accepts Microsoft's assurance, but that she will be watching.

"These are the kinds of things that will come back to haunt you if you don’t, because I have a memory of all these statements," she said.

Kollar-Kotelly’s decision on the entire case is expected in late summer.

Much of the testimony Friday, the last day of hearings before closing arguments scheduled for June 19, centered around how much of Kollar-Kotelly’s time will be taken up by the ongoing battle between Microsoft and the states.

As the trial judge in charge of the case, Kollar-Kotelly will be responsible for disputes over the life of her decree. The states want a 10-year term, whereas Microsoft and the federal government agreed on five years in their settlement last year.

The states have asked the court for a "special master" to serve as an investigator and arbiter of disputes arising from Kollar-Kotelly’s order. Either side could then appeal the special master’s final report to the court.

Microsoft and the government agreed on a three-person technical committee whose main job is to help a complaining party - typically a Microsoft competitor - and Microsoft work out an agreement without going back to the judge.

Unlike the special master, the committee does not have set deadlines and any court action would have to be brought by the Justice Department. Critics, including the states still suing, say this would take too long for fledging companies that need immediate help.

"Delay is fatal when you’re talking about nascent competition," Shenefield said. "Velocity is not one of (Justice’s) signature features."

Rule, who served as a negotiator for Microsoft in settlement talks with the Justice Department, told Kollar-Kotelly the states’ plan "provides no firebreak to your honor," and would allow Microsoft competitors to bring many complaints straight to court.

Kollar-Kotelly appeared to be very skeptical of the states’ plan, particularly the right for competitors to bring complaints to the special master without filtering them through the states.

"It seems to be sort of abdicating their role," she said of the states.

Senate Panel Backs Bill Against E-Mail Spam

A bill aimed at limiting that unwanted junk e-mail known as "spam" was approved and sent to the floor by the Senate Commerce Committee on Friday with unanimous support from Democrats and Republicans.

It would strengthen the Federal Trade Commission’s enforcement authority by allowing it to impose fines of up to $10 per e-mail on e-mails that violate existing laws against spam -- with a cap of $500,000.

Sen. Conrad Burns, a Montana Republican and co-sponsor of the legislation, said the bill would help both e-commerce and consumers burdened by

unsolicited junk or pornographic e-mails.

"Rampant pornography and fraudulent credit deals were never the destiny of the Internet, but they have become commonplace fixtures in in-boxes everywhere," he said.

No similar measure is pending in the U.S. House of Representatives.

New Mexico Republican Rep. Heather Wilson’s bill requiring spammers use a legitimate return address, so unwanted e-mail can more easily be blocked, has not yet been scheduled for a vote.

Twenty-two states have passed anti-spam legislation.

Spam has especially been a problem for rural consumers, many of whom pay long-distance charges for Internet connections and waste time and money erasing their unwanted e-mails, Burns said.

The Senate Commerce Committee on Friday approved an amendment by Sen. Barbara Boxer, a California Democrat, that would prohibit transmitting unwanted e-mails to addresses that were illegally obtained from Web sites.

Co-sponsor Sen. Ron Wyden, an Oregon Democrat, said moving the bill would help the FTC deal with thousands of complaints it has received about spam.

"The problem is, the technology is on the side of the spammer," he said.

The proposal would also require e-marketers to include a working return address to allow recipients the option of refusing further e-mails, and give Internet service providers the ability to bring suit to keep unlawful spam off their networks.

And, it would subject spammers who intentionally disguise their identities to misdemeanor criminal penalties.

FBI Raids "Deceptive Duo" Suspects

The FBI executed search warrants against two former online vandals it believes to be the members of "patriot" hacking group the Deceptive Duo.

Agents confiscated computer equipment from Robert Lyttle, previously convicted of defacing dozens of sites under the moniker Pimpshiz, in California on Monday, in connection with the Deceptive Duo case. The bureau also took equipment from The-Rev, a former member of the hacking group Sm0ked Crew, in Florida on Sunday, said a friend of the two hackers.

"They knew that they were going to get caught," said Kelly Hallissey, a Las Vegas resident who bills herself as an "online mom" to several hackers, including the two suspects. She worried that the teenagers would be made an example under new laws passed as part of the U.S.A. Patriot Act and maintains that they truly thought they were helping.

The Deceptive Duo has defaced dozens of U.S. government and military sites with pro-American messages lambasting the poor security of the nation’s critical systems. The hacked sites have included those of the Defense Department and the Sandia National Laboratories, which is associated with the U.S. Department of Energy (news - web sites)’s National Nuclear

Security Administration.

"This is their part in helping after 9-11," Hallissey said. "A lot of kids they knew went into the service after 9-11. Their skills lie in hacking, however. It sounds corny, but they mean it and they believe it."

Dodie Katague, deputy district attorney for California's Contra Costa county, confirmed that Lyttle had appeared in a probation hearing on Wednesday to discuss how his probation status would be affected by the new charges.

"Now that he is an adult--he is 18--we are letting the Feds handle it," said Katague. "And he is going to be in a lot more trouble than before." Lyttle was convicted of defacing dozens, and perhaps hundreds, of Web sites with a pro-Napster message. He is on probation.

An FBI representative in San Francisco confirmed that the bureau executed a search warrant against Lyttle. Bureau representatives in Florida and Washington could not be immediately contacted for comment.

Many security experts have been critical of the tactics employed by the duo in the name of helping computer security.

"There are probably better ways to tell people that their security sucks," said Dragos Ruiu, an independent security consultant. "In one way, it's an excuse to play around, because they probably would have done it anyway."

Sun's StarOffice Launches Renewed Attack on MS Office

In a campaign to compete directly with Microsoft Office, Sun Microsystems released its new StarOffice suite of applications Wednesday, touting the package as an alternative to proprietary software and noting that StarOffice has fewer licensing restrictions.

With enterprise pricing as low as US$25, StarOffice 6.0 can run on Linux, Solaris and Windows platforms and will retail for $79.95 -- compared with $479 for Microsoft Office or $239 for an MS Office upgrade.

Earlier this year, Sun promised to release a more robust application with better customer support than version 5.2, which the company has offered since it acquired the StarOffice product line in 1999.

Using open and published XML (extensible markup language), documents created in StarOffice can be opened, modified and shared with other programs, such as Office XP.

StarOffice is created from the same software as OpenOffice, an open source project developed by Sun and others in which code is changed and shared among programmers.

The new suite will be made available to the retail market on May 21st.

Mike Rogers, vice president and general manager of desktop and office productivity software at Sun Microsystems, said earlier versions of StarOffice registered more than 8 million downloads, indicating that customers are demanding an alternative to Microsoft Office.

"Our enterprise customers worldwide are asking for freedom of choice, and we're giving it to them with StarOffice 6.0 -- freedom from restrictive licensing and freedom from unreasonable pricing and forced upgrades," Rogers said.

According to Sun, more than 1.8 million users in the enterprise, government and education sectors currently are evaluating the software. The company estimated an aggregate savings of $200 million in licensing costs for those users if they choose to replace Office with StarOffice.

Educational institutions pay only for the cost of the CD and shipping, Sun added.

Sun also noted that such original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) as Hyundai, MandrakeSoft, SuSE Linux, Turbolinux and Ximian are planning to include StarOffice 6.0 in their product offerings.

Microsoft countered the announcement with its own explanation of Sun's new release. A company spokesperson told news sources that the value of Microsoft's Office suite far exceeds its market price, and dubbed StarOffice a "cheap alternative" to Microsoft's Office products.

Rob Perry, senior analyst at the Yankee Group, told NewsFactor that it is unlikely Microsoft is "losing any sleep" over Sun's StarOffice launch.

"The desktop productivity market [race] is over. Microsoft owns it, unless the platform changes to something else and Windows goes away," Perry said.

Despite StarOffice's low price, Perry said he does not believe that companies currently using Office will switch to Sun's offering.

"The price of the application is not that important compared to the cost of retraining people," Perry said. "If you have to relearn these applications, it costs you much more than $400 in productivity loss.

"That's the real thing that holds Office in the enterprise," he added.

But Perry noted that he does see a market for StarOffice among high-end home users, many of whom he predicted will experiment with using Linux, if they have not already done so.

"They're not paying $400 for Office anyway -- they're getting upgrades from their neighbors. There is still lots of sharing in the home market," Perry said.

Perry added that with its new, more restrictive licensing and registration policies, Microsoft is trying its best to put an end to sharing. Its efforts so far, however, have had little effect beyond simply raising consumers' ire.

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